

# Northern Lights

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Operated by **serco**

# Welcome



**We are pleased that the summer of 2022 has allowed us to deliver a Northern Isles service more akin to our normal service, given the restrictions which we were all subject to during 2020 and 2021.**

COVID-19 passenger safety remains a priority on public transport and I would ask that you respect government guidelines, which may be issued from time to time, and work with my colleagues both onboard and in our shore terminal facilities, respecting our place of work and the public space you share with fellow travellers.

On a technical note, and as a follow on from our COVID-19 risk assessments, we are installing more virus negating measures with a new air purification system on board our vessels, to further enhance passenger safety. We have identified an emergent, and industry leading technology developed by PlasmaGuard. It's an air and surface purification solution which cleans indoor air and surfaces of viruses, allergens, pathogens, and harmful chemicals. This solution is intended to deactivate the structure of viruses and bacteria, including coronavirus surrogates, E. coli, norovirus, and many more.

Through the air flow from the ship's AC fan, it bombards the air with millions of air-cleaning oxygen ions, removing 99.9% of particulates and germs. The result will be that every vent in the ship becomes its own air purification unit, so my colleagues and you as passengers are always breathing the cleanest air possible.

Our plan is to first install the system on Hrossey and Hjaltland during September and October this year with the Hamnavoe scheduled for fit out at dry dock in January 2023.

Although the solution has been widely and successfully deployed in large buildings around the world, we believe our vessels will be the first to be installed with this pioneering new technology within the maritime sector, another great milestone for Serco NorthLink.

Having just reached our 10th operating anniversary on 5th July, I thought you might be interested in reading some of our key statistics, demonstrating the services we have delivered over the last 10 years:

- 9 In Water Surveys completed
- 29 scheduled dry dockings
- 32,845 sailings covering over 2.9 million nautical miles
- Over 566,000 cabins used and then turned around for the next booking
- 93,000 pods used since their introduction
- Over 5,250,000 lane meters of freight carried, equivalent to 387,000 trailers
- 1,400,000 sheep shipped
- 265,000 cattle carried onboard and transferred through our lairages
- 2.8 million passengers
- 721,000 cars carried
- 220,000 fish and chips sold

Captain Alick MacLellan, Mate Master on the M.V. Hamnavoe is our featured colleague in this issue and one of our team who have successfully delivered these amazing statistics. My thanks to everyone in the team here at Serco NorthLink Ferries, front of house, behind the scenes, bridge, deck and engine room for everything you do day in and day out.

This July we stepped in when another operator had operational issues and for a period of 17 days carried more than a thousand passengers every consecutive day on the Pentland Firth. Smashing by far the previous five-day record set in August 2019, our highest daily volume carried this July on the Hamnavoe was 1,830 passengers, a great example of mobilising in less than two days to provide cover in an emergency and maintain lifeline service delivery.

On the environmental front we are really pleased to have gone live with our Hamnavoe shore power plug-in at Stromness on 30th May this year. Already we are seeing this initiative deliver a reduction of 17 tonnes of fuel monthly, and a reduction in CO2 emissions of 55 metric tonnes, which is the equivalent of over 12 Olympic sized swimming pools!

Our plans for a similar initiative at both Aberdeen and Lerwick are proceeding at pace with significant works already undertaken on both Hjaltland and Hrossey in preparations for a shoreside high voltage supply being installed.

Supporting Scotland's themed years has always been a delight for our marketing team based in Stromness and led as ever by Magnus Dixon. Being Scotland's Year of Stories, 2022 has allowed us to introduce some new characters to you, look out for our Vikings as they get out and about, and perhaps even up to some mischief! I think we have a couple of classics in Issue 14 for you with Tom Muir's traditional Orkney tale of Assipattle and the Stoorworm, followed by the Shetland tale; Robbie Anderson and the Trows, both beautifully illustrated too. Enjoy!

As ever, thank you for sailing with us. My colleagues are on hand if required throughout your time with us and please do let us know how far your copy of Northern Lights Issue 14 travels. Who knows, you might even feature in a future edition.



*Stuart Garrett*  
**Stuart Garrett**  
Managing Director  
Serco NorthLink Ferries

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Front page photograph: David Chapman



# Mate Master Hamnavoe - Alick MacLellan

## Tell us a bit about yourself.

I was born and raised in Oban, where I still live now. I have three daughters – Arianna (18), Millie (16) and Janey (14). They all play in their school pipe band, providing two pipers and a snare drummer to the cause.

## How did you get into your career at sea and your current role?

My dad was an AB deep sea for the Federal Steam Navigation Company and the New Zealand Shipping Company. When his family arrived, he came home and worked for David MacBrayne's, which is now Caledonian MacBrayne. He worked mainly on the Oban to Mull run. Coincidentally, he worked briefly on the Stromness to Scrabster run, the same sailing that I now oversee.

When I was in primary school, one day my dad asked if I fancied going for a trip on the boat with him, and that was me hooked. I never left his side for years. Before I went to high school, I had learned how to splice rope and tie a bowline. I wanted to go to sea.

In Oban High School I was lucky enough to benefit from navigation lessons from second year onwards. I was later accepted to Clyde Marine Training as a cadet and completed my cadetship at the Glasgow College of Nautical Studies with Bibby Line (Liverpool) in 1993.

I spent the following seven years with Bibby Line as third mate, second mate and a few years at the end as chief mate. I then spent five years with Hebridean Island Cruises as chief officer and master before moving to work in the offshore industry, where I spent 11 years on drilling rigs and drill ships with Dolphin Drilling.

With the decline in the industry, I took redundancy in 2017 and was extremely lucky and grateful to have been asked to interview for a chief officer position on Hjaltland where I spent almost a year, before successfully interviewing for the mate master position on Hamnavoe at the end of 2017.

## What is the best part of your job?

There are a couple of aspects of my job that make it difficult to top:

1. The ship handling and associated pilotage, particularly on Hamnavoe where we often have to manage the challenges of the Pentland Firth and Scapa Flow; it is extremely rewarding, challenging, and there's always something new to learn if you're paying attention.
2. Working alongside amazing people who take genuine pride in their ship; how she performs, looks and presents herself. It's a privilege to be a part of such a crew.

## What do you think people might find interesting about being a ship's captain?

We aren't always on the bridge, and we aren't always on the wheel! If I leave the bridge and venture into the public areas, you will often hear passengers say, "If you're down here, who is steering?!", when in fact there is a team of well qualified and experienced officers and crew who man the bridge and monitor the systems.

## 2022 is Scotland's Year of Stories – have you any good stories from your time as a Master?

Not so much a story as a funky fact! My first appointment as master was on the 'Hebridean Princess' which in her former life was a Caledonian MacBrayne car ferry, MV 'Columba'. This was the very same vessel that my dad was working on the day I was born.

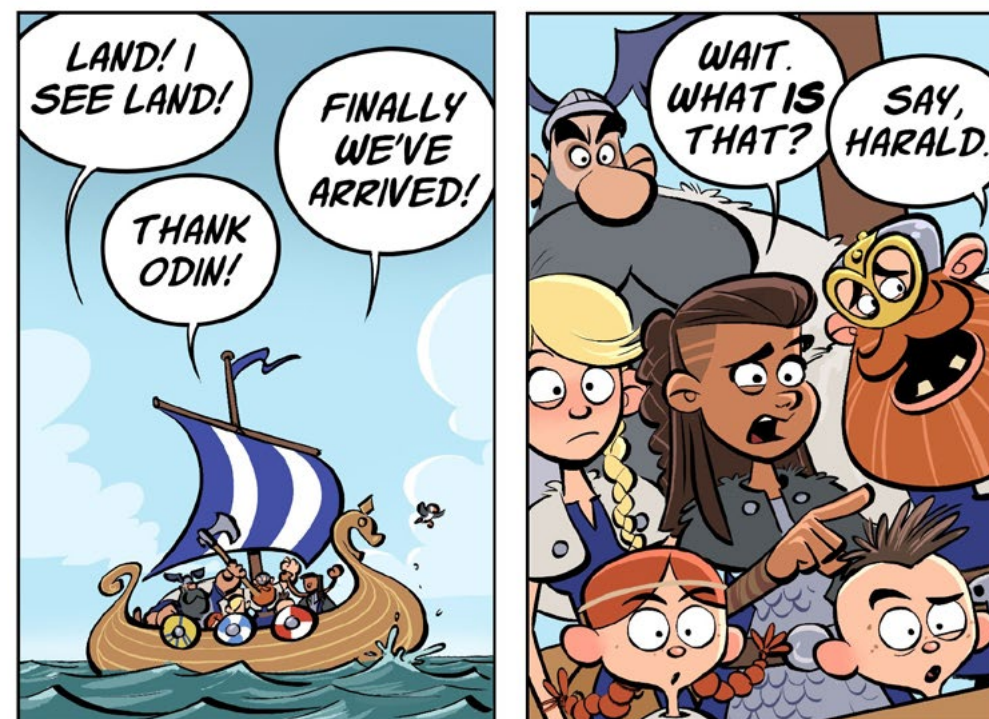
## When you're not working, what do you like to do in your spare time?

In my spare time I like DIY (not to be confused with being any good at it!). I also enjoy football played in the west of Glasgow and sunny drives!



# The Viklings

Alex Leonard – No.1





# The wildlife of Shetland and Orkney

**Many of the jaw-dropping moments of a trip to Orkney and Shetland occur when you have a close encounter with the wildlife of the islands.**

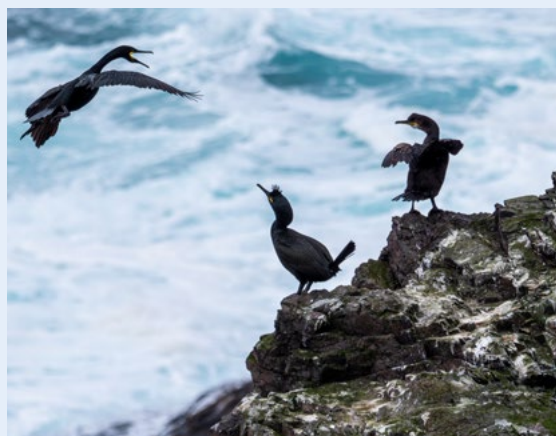
This might be when you see an orca offshore or realise that seals are watching you from the sea. You may drive past an owl on a fencepost or glimpse an otter on the shore. In the islands, the summer air is magical with birdsong, and the rockpools and roadside verges are teeming with life.

Shetland and Orkney have a unique and precious natural heritage, and the islands are an important breeding ground for birds rarely seen in other parts of the UK. Eric Meek of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) once said, "Nowhere in Britain is there such a range of habitats – cliffs, marshes, moors and maritime heath – and all within a few miles."

Let us take you on a journey into the wild landscapes of Shetland and Orkney!

## On the cliffs

Around Orkney and Shetland there are rich waters where the Atlantic Ocean and North Sea meet. This brings plankton, and then fish, and then seabirds.



In summer, the cliffs in Orkney and Shetland are lined with breeding fulmars, razorbills, and gannets. On these islands, exposed sandstone on the coast forms into perfect seabird ledges.

Rabbits can be seen darting around grassier edges, and colourful puffins return from winter on the sea to nest in grassy cliffside burrows. Pink thrift and the blue stars of spring squill flower along the cliff tops.

**Good Orkney cliffs to spot nature:** Marwick Head, Yesnaby, the Brough of Birsay, the Castle of Burrian in Westray

**Good Shetland cliffs to spot nature:** Sumburgh Head, Noss, Hermaness in Unst, Fair Isle



## On the shore

Shetland has 1,700 miles of coastline in total, while Orkney has 500 miles. Along the shore, many wading birds, such as Oystercatcher and Redshank, can be spotted picking in the sand for food. Not too far out in the water, Eider ducks bounce in the waves with their ducklings not far behind.

In the rockpools there are anemones and starfish. Hermit crabs are in shells that suddenly come alive and scuttle away. We'd recommend hunting for cowrie shells for luck. These are known as 'groatie buckies'. Put one in your purse and you'll never be poor.



Shellfish are abundant around the islands and delicious on restaurant menus. There's a traditional way to hunt for razor shells (known as 'spoots') by walking backwards in the sand and looking for air bubbles. In Shetland tasty mussels are farmed, and in Orkney, scallops are picked from the seabed by divers.

Common seals and grey seals are plentiful on both island groups. Common seals are much smaller than grey seals and have a dog-like head. They will watch people on the shore with great curiosity.

Grey seals come ashore in the winter to give birth to fluffy white seal pups and are the star of the NorthLink sponsored 'sealcam'. The pups grow large on their mother's fatty milk and take to the water five or six weeks after birth. 5% of the world's population of common seals and 36% of the world's population of grey seals live in Scottish waters.

In Shetland there are large numbers of otters that catch fish, eels, and crabs beneath the seaweed floating by the shore. Though they are very shy of people now, they were once introduced to the islands by men, perhaps to assist with fishing. These elusive creatures often live near streams and lochs close to the sea and use fresh water to wash and dry their fur. Otters, known as draatsi in Shetland, can be spotted at dawn and dusk by patient (and quiet) observers. Otters can be found in Orkney too but in fewer numbers than in Shetland.

**Good Orkney shores to spot nature:** The Brough of Birsay, the Brig o' Waithe, Sanday

**Good Shetland shores to spot nature:** Rerwick beach, Lunna, Yell

## In the moorland and fields

The wild moorland and fertile fields of Orkney and Shetland can be noisy places! The calls of curlew, lapwings, and skylarks fill the summer air. Insects such as moths, butterflies, hoverflies, and bumblebees alight on the wildflowers amongst the pink and purple heather. In Hoy on Orkney, dragonflies can be seen on the sunniest days.







In Orkney, special creatures have lived here for 4,000 years, and the most obvious sign of them are tunnels through the wild grass. These tunnels are made by Orkney Voles, which are small and brown, but heavier in build than a mouse. They have small ears and a short tail. Unlike most rodents, the Orkney Vole is active in daytime and an easy target for predators. This means that large numbers of hen harriers, kestrel, merlin, and short eared owls live in Orkney (but do not in Shetland where there are no voles). In the summer you may see a special display – hen harriers 'sky dancing' over the moorland to attract a mate.

The number of Artic Skua in the islands has grown in recent years. They are aggressive birds that divebomb hillwalkers who get too close to their nests. Artic Skua are also known to attack other birds and steal their food.



In Shetland, you'll frequently spot Shetland Ponies running wild and free on the moorland. They are hardy animals, and friendly too.

In autumn, the skies fill with honking geese, and many of them land on the fields of Orkney for the winter.

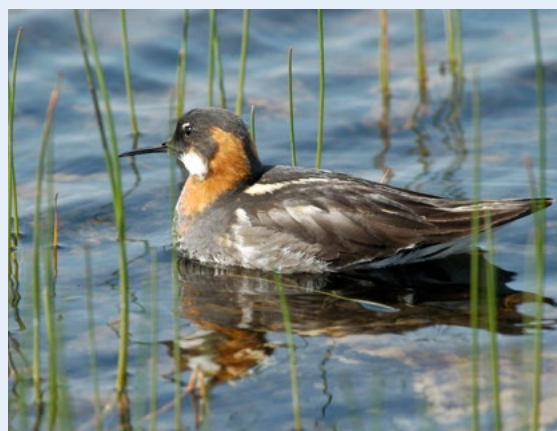
**Good Orkney moorland to spot nature:** Hoy, Cottascarth in Rendall, Hobbister in Orphir

**Good Shetland moorland to spot nature:** Yell, Fair Isle, Fetlar, Foula

### In the lochs

In Orkney and Shetland there are fantastic lochs to fish, and fishermen can rent boats or pull on waders to catch the brown trout that swim in the murky depths.

Orkney lochs also attract a wide variety of waterfowl, including swans, mallard, teal, and wigeon. In Shetland, a loch on the island of Fetlar is attractive to beautiful little waders, the rare, red-necked



phalarope. The island is home to over 90% of the UK's breeding population of these brightly crested birds. Hill lochs in both Shetland and Orkney are popular with elegant, red-throated divers.

Frogs and tadpoles are often found in Orkney and Shetland lochs.

**Good Orkney lochs to spot nature:** The Loch of Stenness, Mill Dam in Shapinsay, the Loons in Birsay, Mill loch in Eday, Burger Hill in Evie

**Good Shetland lochs to spot nature:** The Loch of Funzie in Fetlar, the Pool of Virkie in the South Mainland, small lochs in the west mainland

### Out at sea

Many creatures come to feed in the rich blue seas around the Orkney and Shetland islands. Out in deep water, where oceans meet, there can be found nearly 20 species of whales. Pilot whales were once driven ashore in large numbers, but this practise came to an end in the 19th century. They can now be spotted



from boats, as can minke whales (called the herring hog by fishermen!), sperm whales, and sometimes humpback whales.

It seems as though Orca are seen near the shores of Orkney and Shetland more often these days. In truth social media alerts spread word of sightings much more quickly. Large, sleek black orca hunt in packs and catch seals on their summer visits. They can swim at speeds of over 34mph. Orca are often seen in deep inshore water from cliff tops. Make sure you follow an orca watching social feed to be notified about where to go!

Basking sharks can be seen from time to time. These slow peaceful gentle giants have massive mouths for catching plankton. Risso's dolphins and bottlenose dolphins glide together in the water between islands. There are regular sightings of harbour porpoises from the ferry to Mousa, called 'neesicks' from the noise they make as they emerge from the water.

**Good areas of sea in Orkney to spot nature:** Scapa Flow, the coast of the West Mainland

**Good areas of sea in Shetland to spot nature:** The ferry to Mousa, around Bressay and Noss

### The Orkney Native Wildlife Project

In recent years, nature in Orkney has faced a new threat – stoats. Though native on the UK Mainland, stoats only arrived in Orkney in 2010 and, with no known predator here to keep the population in

check, this invasive non-native species have quickly decimated the native wildlife. These skilled hunters eat Orkney voles and feast upon the eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds.



To rid the islands of stoats, the Orkney Native Wildlife Project laid a series of stoat traps and have trained Europe's first stoat detection conservation dogs. You can help too – if you spot a stoat, distinctive with its lolloping run, sandy coloured body and black tail, make sure you report it on Orkney Native Wildlife Project's website at [www.orkneynativewildlife.org.uk](http://www.orkneynativewildlife.org.uk).





# Gardening in the Orkney Islands



**Gardening in Orkney can sometimes be a struggle due to the constant battle with the wind. However, you can produce great results if you persevere. We spoke to Caroline Critchlow, the resident gardening guru on BBC Radio Orkney, to find out more.**

## What do you love about gardening?

What I love is the effect of gardening – when you sit back and look, and you've created a thing of beauty.

## Can you tell us a bit about your garden?

My current garden has been a challenge because, prior to us moving in, it was a holiday cottage car park. We had to get diggers in and use a pickaxe to create areas to put my plants in. It's an ongoing project and I'm loving it.

## What piece of gardening are you most proud of?

The geranium garden with the moon gate. Fiona Smith from Kierfield House and I gathered the geraniums, which were hard to get a hold of. Some of them were awarded RHS Golden merits, which only the best plants get. Having so many of them in one small space makes a fantastic show when they bloom. Geraniums are brilliant perennials that do well in Orkney.

## What other plants are best suited to the Orkney climate?

Alchemilla Mollis, which can be a thug, but if managed, can be beautiful. Primroses, Centaurea



and Crocosmia grow well. Hemerocallis day lily thrive up here, Kniphofia 'Red Hot Pokers' are great, and they grow wild by the side of the road.

## How do you deal with the wind in Orkney?

Designing a garden that can be cut down in winter is a good option. I put up wind fences, and bear in mind that when you plant in Orkney you must plant very close together. Another option is to use hardy plants like Alchemilla Mollis as shelter for a more precious plant.

## How do you decide what parts of your garden to leave wild?

Because I haven't got such a big garden now, I don't have as much wildness as I would like. I mitigate that by putting in lots of bee-friendly plants: Marguerite daisies, Verbena Bonariensis, Buddlejias. You don't have to have a wild garden to be good to nature.

## What equipment do you think everyone should have?

A hand trowel and a small hand fork. I also recommend a pair of secateurs, a garden fork, a long lever for hooking weeds out and sheep shears for cutting down your perennials.

## Is there one thing you wish everyone knew about gardening?

Everybody can do it. Folk often say, "I'm just not a gardener, I can't make things grow." However, that's wrong – everybody has a gardener in them.

## If there was one piece of advice you could give about gardening in Orkney, what would it be?

Remember there's a right plant for the right place. Don't try and replicate UK mainland gardens, work with the weather, work with the climate, and your garden will be a joy!

# Gardening in Shetland: The Jubilee Flower Park



**There are many beautiful gardens in Shetland and some even welcome visitors! One such garden is the Jubilee Flower Park in Lerwick – a peaceful town centre sanctuary. Diane Inkster, who has tended the garden for many years, offered us some tips.**

## What do you love about gardening?

My favourite part of gardening is being outside in the fresh air. You appreciate the seasons and how they change more when you do gardening.



## Can you tell us a little about the Jubilee Flower Park?

The park has planted areas, a bowling green, a putting green and a tennis court. It's a lovely place to visit. It started off as waste ground that was planned for housing, but the council bought it for recreational purposes. The park was opened in 1953 by the Duke of Edinburgh.

## What is your favourite gardening memory?

I have wonderful memories of times spent with various work colleagues, and the park is always a nicer place to work when the summers are good.

## Which plants are best suited to Shetland?

Shrubs such as Flowering Currant, Fuchsia, Hebe, Elder, Cotoneaster and Escallonia are best suited to the harsh climate. Plants including Lupin, Crocosmia, Shasta Daisy, Columbine, New Zealand Flax, Geranium, and various ornamental grasses grow well in Shetland.

## How do you deal with the wind?

The wind in Shetland can be severe, so shelter is essential for growing anything. You can use fencing, walls, and hedging for shelter or plant trees and shrubs to act as wind breaks.

## How do you choose the areas to leave wild?

The flower park is a more formal garden and tends to be neat and tidy, so we don't have any wild areas. However, we do grow various bee and butterfly friendly plants and use wildflowers such as Ragged Robin, Campion, Self-Heal, Oxeye Daisy and Field Poppies.

## What equipment do you think everyone should have?

Every gardener should have secateurs, a spade, fork, hand trowel, hand fork, long handled pruners, shears, rake, hoe and a sturdy wheelbarrow!

## Is there one thing you wish everyone knew about gardening?

Some assume there is no gardening to do in winter, but that's untrue. Certain pruning work is done in the winter and tidying up. It's when we prepare our greenhouses in the run up to bringing on our bedding plants.

## What advice would you give about gardening in Shetland?

Everyone can grow something whether you have a large or small garden, or no garden at all. You can begin with something simple and go on from there.



# Fair Isle North

**Midway between North Ronaldsay in Orkney and Sumburgh Head in Shetland, there's a dramatic sight for seafarers to take in. Far off to the east, the lumbering cliffs of Fair Isle are jagged on the misty horizon.**

It's a lovely little island, famed for the sheep that eat the salted grass, the migrating rare birds that often make landfall here, and for distinctive Fair Isle knitting patterns. In previous centuries however its shoals and rocks have torn the sides out of hundreds of lost ships. The most famous shipwreck was 'El Gran Grifon' from the Spanish Armada.

In 1892 two white stone guardians were built on Fair Isle. The tall South Light at Skaddan is a warning finger to sailors, and it featured in Issue 1 of 'Northern Lights'. The North Light, at Skroo on the north east tip of Fair Isle, is worthy of attention too.



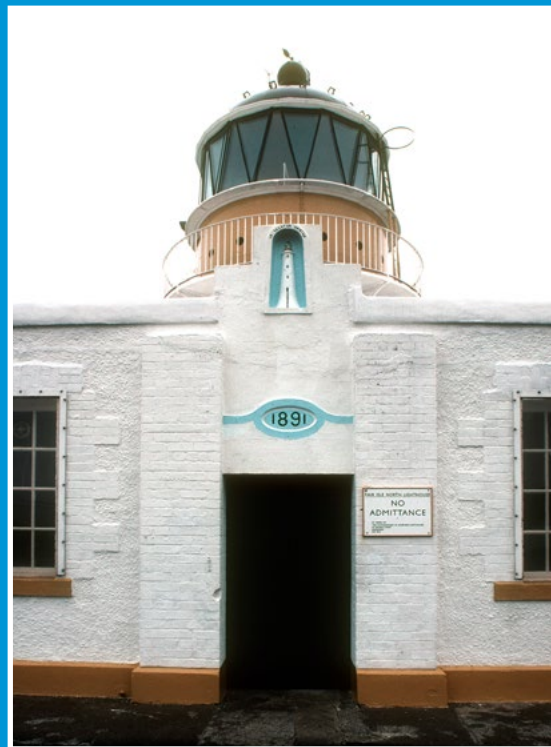
The road to Fair Isle's North Light is a treacherous one which leads uphill along a winding road. On the approach to the North Light there are steep drops to the sea on one side.

The North Light stands on much higher ground than the South Light. The South Light had to be 105 feet tall to be seen by passing ships, but the cliff the North Light stands on is already 215 feet above sea level. This means that only a short circular tower is required, and it stands upon a flat roofed office. In all, the lighthouse is 47 feet tall. It shines 22 miles out to sea in all weathers, pulsing twice every 30 seconds.

A flat-roofed, two storey accommodation block accompanied the North Light. The lamp was originally illuminated using paraffin and turned by clockwork. Though the Fair Isle Lighthouses were built to prevent shipwrecks, they were also built to assist with the manoeuvres of the Royal Navy.

Both Fair Isle North and Fair Isle South were constructed by David A Stevenson and his brother Charles Stevenson, who were from a long line of famous lighthouse-builders. Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote 'Treasure Island', 'Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', and 'Kidnapped' also came from the same family.

The lighthouses on Fair Isle greatly contributed to the islands' economic wellbeing. The lightkeepers and their families brought children to the school and custom to the local shop. Auxiliary keepers were often hired from the island, and there were instances of keepers marrying Fair Isle lasses.



There was good-natured rivalry between the teams of men that tended to Fair Isle's two lighthouses. They competed in a monthly sport contest for a trophy – a cheap plastic cup painted silver. Darts tournaments were also held at the North Light, and a golf contest at the South Light. Each of the six holes on the golf course were made with a steamed pudding tin and marked by broom handle.

There were tales of great heroism and sacrifice by the keepers too, especially during WW2 when lighthouses were an easy target for swarms of enemy planes. Bombs were dropped in December 1941 that flattened outbuildings at the North Light. At the South Light, explosions from the bombing run killed the wife of the assistant keeper.

Then, at 3.45pm on 21 January 1942, two bombs from another air attack tore chunks out of the South Light, its accommodation block, store houses and

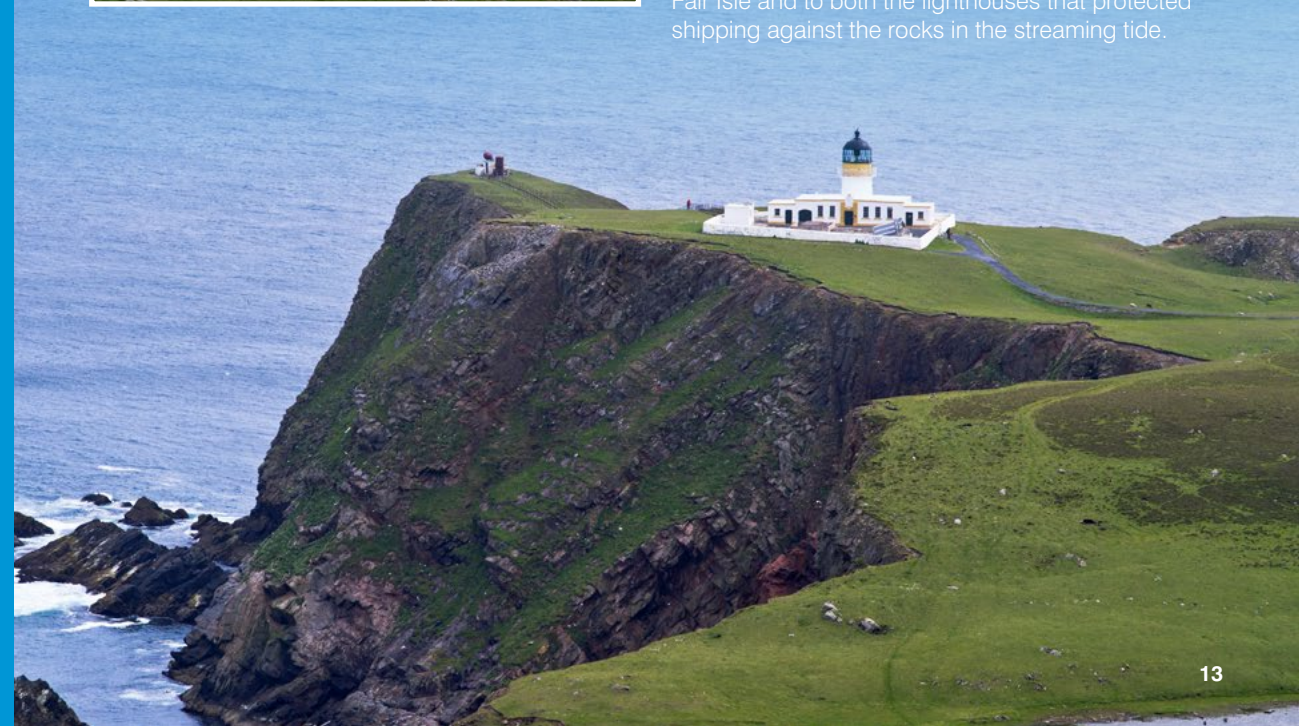
boundary wall. In this attack, the principal keeper's wife and daughter were killed, along with a soldier who was manning an anti-aircraft gun nearby.

Against the odds, Robert Macauley, one of the North Light keepers, journeyed southwards through a gale and snow drifts to help. With his assistance, the South Light was functional again that night. Robert Macauley then began his long walk home to operate the North Light. He received the British Empire Medal for his heroic actions.

In more recent years the light was automated and from 1983 keepers were no longer required. The accommodation block was removed at the North Light and the Fair Isle population greatly felt the loss of the keepers and their families. The South Light became automated in 1998, the last Scottish Lighthouse to do so.

The North Light is well worth visiting today, and those that do so will be taken with the impressive foghorn, which sits out on a promontory called the Nizz. The foghorn can be easily spotted from the sea. Once this was reached by a path hemmed in by iron railings to prevent keepers from being blown away in a gale. In recent years concrete sections of the path have fallen away, so the foghorn is probably best admired from afar.

Above the lighthouse, on Ward Hill, there is a radio station, and along the coast there are seabird cliffs, sea stacks and a collapsed sea cave called the Kirn of Skroo. We hope you enjoy your visit to lovely Fair Isle and to both the lighthouses that protected shipping against the rocks in the streaming tide.





# Fascinating facts about St Magnus Cathedral

**Located in Kirkwall, St Magnus Cathedral is a magnificent building. Though almost 900 years old, it is still a popular venue for church services, weddings, funerals, and the St Magnus International Festival.**

- **The cathedral is named after Magnus Erlendsson.** When Orkney and Shetland were part of Scandinavia and ruled by Norse Earls, Magnus shared his earldom with his cousin Haakon Paulsson. They ruled amicably from 1105 to 1114 until their followers began to quarrel.
- Peace was to be negotiated on the island of Egilsay, but Haakon arrived with many more men and hostile intentions. Magnus was captured and executed by axe on 16th April 1118.
- Magnus was first buried where he fell, and the rocky area around his grave miraculously became a green field. He was later buried in Birsay and there followed more miracles and healings. **In 1135 Magnus was canonised**, and 16th April became St Magnus Day.
- **Work on St Magnus Cathedral started in 1137** making it one of the oldest cathedrals in Scotland.
- The Cathedral is built with red sandstone from the Head of Holland in Kirkwall and yellow sandstone from the island of Eday. The bones of St Magnus were interned within a pillar.
- The great age of St Magnus Cathedral means it has **smaller windows** than those found in modern churches.
- After Orkney became part of Scotland, the Cathedral was **given to the inhabitants of Kirkwall** by King James III in 1486.
- The original tall Cathedral spire was struck by lightning in the late seventeenth century. It was replaced by a **dumpy slated pyramidal roof**.



Later, between 1913 and 1930, a tall steeple of copper sheeting was built, and this is the spire we see today.

- In the 17th Century, for a fee, Kirkwall people could be buried under the floor of the cathedral.
- St Magnus Cathedral's graveyard is estimated to contain at least **5,888 people!**
- St Magnus Cathedral also contains **memorials to prominent Orcadians** including explorer Dr John Rae, writers George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir, and artist Stanley Cursiter. There is also the bell from the Royal Oak - a battleship sunk in 1939 with the loss of 835 lives.
- The **final programme of Mastermind** to be hosted by Magnus Magnusson was filmed in St Magnus Cathedral.

## Children's Activity: Buried Treasure



Bonxie the Viking is close to discovering some buried treasure! Can you draw what he will find?



# The Castle and Gardens of Mey

**Along the most northerly coast of Scotland, in the parish of Canisbay, there is a delightful castle to visit. The Castle of Mey was the summer home of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, and she loved spending time in Caithness.**

The castle is the most northerly on the British Isles, and the Queen Mother gifted it to The Queen Elizabeth Castle of Mey Trust in 1996. It is still visited every year in August by HRH, Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay and there are daily tours around the Castle of Mey in summer when it isn't in use.

These tours are fantastic, allowing remarkable access to a Royal home, including entertaining rooms, bedrooms and kitchens. It is easy to imagine when looking at a chair in a room that perhaps only a

few weeks previously a member of the Royal Family might have been sitting there, reading a book or chatting to family or friends.

The Castle of Mey was built by the 4th Earl of Caithness between 1566 and 1572. It was renamed Barrogill Castle and became the home of the Earls of Caithness for many years until it was purchased by Captain Frederic Bouhier Imbert-Terry in 1929. The castle was briefly used as an officers' rest home during the Second World War but was almost completely uninhabitable when the Queen Mother first saw it in 1952.

At the time, the Queen Mother was visiting Dunnet Head while mourning the death of her husband, King George VI. When she heard that Barrogill Castle was about to be abandoned, she declared: "Never! It's part of Scotland's heritage. I'll save it."

Between 1952 and 1955, the Queen Mother set about restoring the castle and creating its beautiful gardens. She changed the name from Barrogill

Castle back to the Castle of Mey and for almost half a century she spent many happy summers there. She is quoted as saying: "Caithness is a county of such great beauty, combining as it does the peace and tranquillity of open countryside with the rugged glory of a magnificent coastline. It is a delight to me now that I have a home there."

The Castle of Mey stands on rising ground about 400 yards from the seashore, overlooking the Pentland Firth and the Orkney Islands. Visitors arriving in the front hall will see a mirror stand where the Queen Mother laid the seashells that she found on her frequent walks to the beach. A tour of the castle and gardens allows visitors to see her summer home much as she left it after her last visit in October 2001. The Queen Mother died at the great age of 101 in March 2002.

During the tour, you'll learn about Royal dining etiquette and hear affectionate tales about the Queen Mother. We were surprised to learn that she was quite frugal, coming as she did from a generation that had lived through two World Wars.

Treasured family photographs still adorn the table in the library, and we enjoyed the Royal Coat of Arms tapestry and works of art in the dining room. The visitors' book in the drawing room contains the signature 'Lilibet', which is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's family nickname.

Your entry ticket allows access to the grounds and gardens to be enjoyed at your own pace. The traditional Scottish walled garden and the east garden were created out of a wilderness by the Queen Mother. The middle of the garden is planted with vegetables for the Royal dining table, and it is surrounded by fruit and herbaceous borders.

There is also an Animal Centre in the east woods. Meeting the donkey, the pigs, and some very noisy geese was a high point for my children during our visit.

The castle and gardens are open from 1st May to 30th September 2022 every Wednesday to Sunday and closed from 25th July to 12th August 2022 inclusive. These dates are subject to change, and the Animal Centre has varying opening times, so please keep up to date on the website [www.castleofmey.org.uk](http://www.castleofmey.org.uk)

Castle Tours run from 11.00am in half hour time slots available to book at [www.castleofmey.org.uk/tours](http://www.castleofmey.org.uk/tours). Pre-booking your visit is essential to avoid disappointment.

The Visitor Centre, Tearoom and Shop are open from 10.30am. Most of the grounds of the Castle of Mey are dog friendly.

**By Magnus Dixon**





# Aberdeen Marine Operations Centre

**The Marine Operations Centre stands in a prominent position on the North Breakwater at the entrance to the Port of Aberdeen. Commissioned in 2006, it was the work of SMC Parr Architects Ltd and was built by Sir Robert McAlpine.**



NorthLink Ferries' ships to Shetland and Orkney sail past this distinctive modernist glass tower, and we are often asked what its purpose is.

We asked Ewan Rattray, a Deputy Harbour Master who forms part of the

Integrated Port Management team based in the Marine Operations Centre to tell us more.

## **What does your job as Deputy Harbour Master involve?**

My main role is to manage port marine safety from the Marine Operations Centre.

This can vary day-to-day, from managing our fantastic team of marine staff or assisting in the delivery of new marine projects, all the way to managing port emergencies and investigating marine incidents.

## **The Marine Operations Centre is quite an eye-catching building – what is its purpose?**

The Marine Operations Centre is a base of operations for Vessel Traffic Services, our Port Pilotage Service, and the Port Management team.

I suppose it could be described as the port equivalent of an air traffic control tower that you might see at an airport. The building was commissioned to replace the old control tower, known as the Roundhouse, which can still be seen down on the shores of Footdee.

One of the most important jobs we do here is ensuring safe transit for any vessels into and through the port. To do this, our Marine Pilots will sometimes board a ship, take the conn and either steer the vessel or guide it safely through the harbour and over to its berth.

## **How many ships roughly move in and out of the Port daily?**

It varies day-per-day, but including vessel shifts, last year there were roughly 21,000 vessel movements in total. The Port of Aberdeen serves a very wide variety of industries.

## **How does the weather impact your role?**

The weather in the North of Scotland isn't always kind and can be challenging throughout the year. High winds have been known to push vessels off course, or choppy seas can prevent the safe boarding and landing of the Pilot. In the warmer months the warm air passing over cold seas can result in thick fog. Our team has specialist local knowledge and advanced ship handling skills to make sure we're always able to do our jobs safely.

## **Do you ever spot anything unusual or interesting from the tower?**

We are exceptionally privileged to get a great view of the local marine wildlife and on a clear day can see a variety of birds taking flight as well as seals and otters bobbing above the water. There is also a pod of bottlenose dolphins which can be spotted off Torry Battery. This is a fantastic sight for people leaving or entering the Port of Aberdeen.





# Folklore in the isles with Tom Muir

Tom is a champion of Orkney's folk tales, bringing them back to the public through books and as a professional storyteller. His day job is at the Orkney Museum, which involves working with the media in radio, newspapers, magazines and TV. Alongside his wife Rhonda, he runs the website [Orkneyology.com](http://Orkneyology.com), which is now expanding into a publishing company. This will bring more stories into the world at a time when they are much needed.



When asked about why folklore is important, Tom says, "I think that if you want to understand a people you've got to understand their folk tales – I've always felt that. It reflects the character of the people and also in the technical age we still need a bit of magic in our lives and that's what this supplies; it's a connection with your ancestors. Also, it's good entertainment!"

Tom tells two traditional tales to celebrate Scotland's Year of Stories, one from Orkney and one from Shetland.

## An Orkney Folk Tale: Assipattle and the Stoorworm

There was once a kingdom in the north that suffered a terrible fate. The Stoorworm arrived at its coast and started to yawn. The Stoorworm was the oldest and largest of all the sea serpents and its yawning meant that it was hungry and needed to be fed.

A wise man said that the only way to save the country was to feed the Stoorworm seven people every Saturday morning. This happened for a time, but it was too high a price to pay, so the king turned back to the wise man for more advice. He was told that the only thing that would make the Stoorworm go

away is if it was fed the king's only child, the Princess Gem-de-Lovely.

Instead, the king called for a brave knight to fight and kill the Stoorworm in return for his kingdom and the king's magic sword, Sikkersnapper. Many brave knights answered the challenge, but most ran away or fainted when they saw how big the monster was. Eventually the king declared that he would fight the Stoorworm himself.

On a small farm there lived a couple with seven sons. The six eldest worked hard, but the youngest did nothing but lie by the fireside, raking through the ashes, so they called him Assipattle (ash-raker). He said that he would fight the Stoorworm, but his brothers just beat him and called him names.

The night before the king was due to fight the monster, Assipattle stole his father's horse and rode to the bay where the Stoorworm's head lay. He found a small cottage there and took an iron pot into which he placed a glowing peat from the fire.

He stole the king's boat and sailed towards the monster, just as it woke. The water that flowed into the Stoorworm's mouth as it

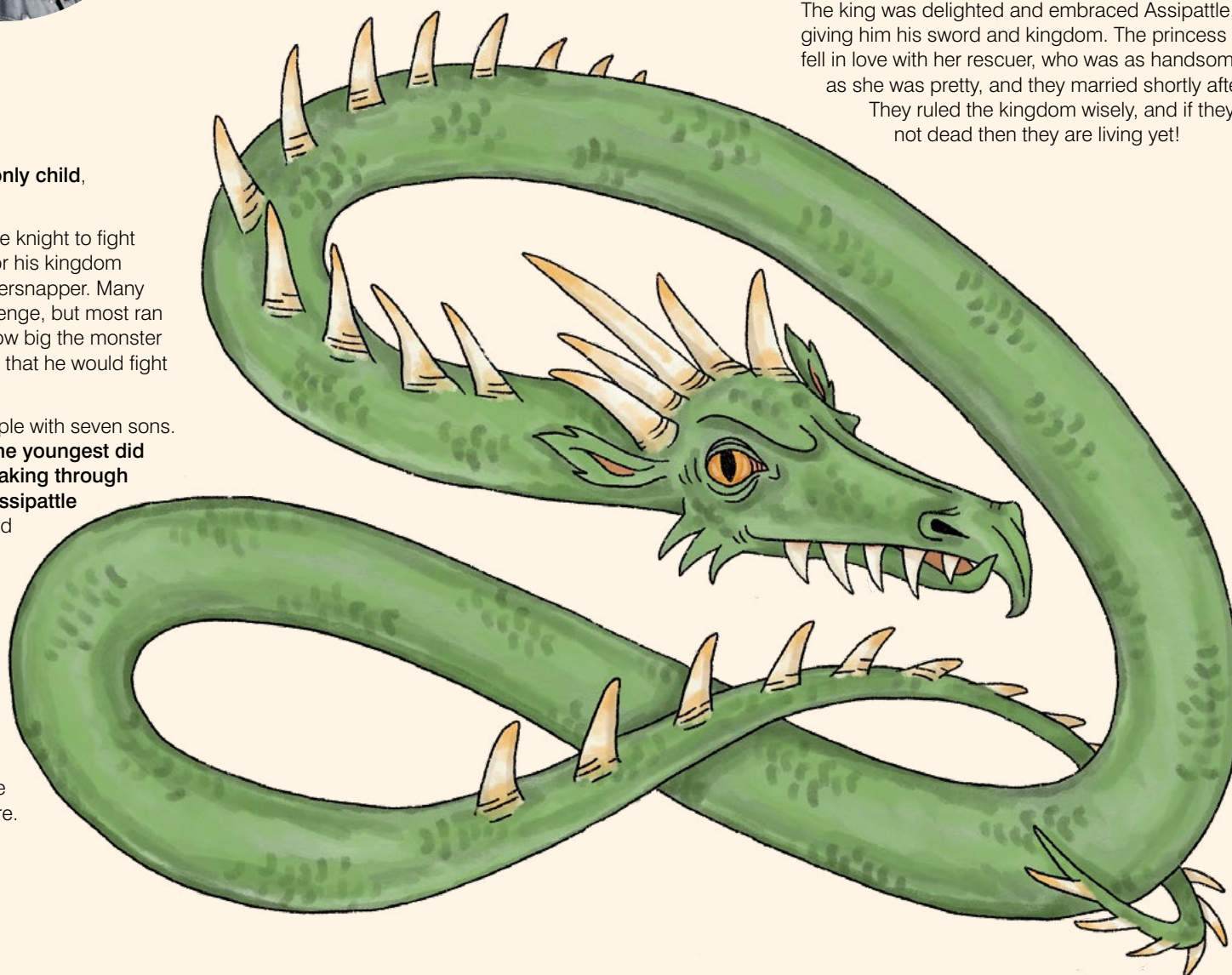
yawned carried Assipattle and the boat down its throat. When the boat came to rest inside the monster, he ran until he found the Stoorworm's liver and he set it on fire with the smouldering peat. The oil in the liver spluttered into flames and was soon blazing away.

The king had arrived just in time to see Assipattle sail his boat into the monster's mouth and be swallowed. He expected his kingdom to be destroyed at any time. But instead, they saw smoke coming out the Stoorworm's nose and mouth. The dying creature spewed out all the water that was in it, including Assipattle and the boat.

It shot out its huge forked tongue and grabbed the moon, but it slipped over it and fell to earth with a crash. The tongue left a huge hole in the surface of the earth, which filled with water to become the Baltic Sea. Its head rose up high and fell back down with such a force that some of its teeth were knocked out. These teeth made the Orkney Islands.

A second time the head rose and fell, knocking out more teeth, which became Shetland. A third time saw more teeth knocked out, making the Faroe Islands. Then it curled up its body into a tight lump and died, and there it remains as Iceland. The volcanos and boiling water gushing out of the ground are the result of the fire that still rages in the Stoorworm's liver.

The king was delighted and embraced Assipattle, giving him his sword and kingdom. The princess fell in love with her rescuer, who was as handsome as she was pretty, and they married shortly after. They ruled the kingdom wisely, and if they are not dead then they are living yet!





# A Shetland Folk Tale: Robbie Anderson and the Trows

**Folk tales were told in the Northern Isles in times gone past featuring magical creatures living in the landscape. We hope you enjoy this traditional tale from Shetland, Robbie Anderson and the Trows, released to celebrate Scotland's Year of Stories.**

Robbie Anderson lived in Cullivoe in the island of Yell with his wife and children. The Andersons were poor people, eking out a living from the land and fishing. **Robbie was famous for being the best fiddle player in the parish.**

One Owld Yul Een (Old Christmas Eve, 7th January) Robbie was returning from feeding his sheep when he was accosted on the path by a tiny man with red hair that Robbie knew was a trow (a fairy). Robbie didn't trust the trows and wanted nothing to do with them.

"Robbie!" he said, "I want you to play at our Owld Yul Foy." A foy is a party. "I'm sorry," Robbie replied, "On Owld Yul Een I go to visit friends and play for them." **The trow said, "If you change your mind, I will make it worth your while but if you do play for us, you must not tell anyone."**

Robbie found the decision really hard, but when night came, he took his fiddle under his arm and set off towards the trow's home. The door in the hillside was open and there were sounds of laughter and glasses clinking. The same tiny red haired trow was there to greet him.

The trows loved Robbie's music and Robbie played like he had never played before, in fact, some of the tunes that he played were unknown to him. He

played until morning when he was left on his own. **The trows had promised to pay him, but Robbie got nothing, not even a thank you.** He dreaded the reunion with his wife; he had refused to tell her where he was going. It was not a warm welcome that Robbie got from his wife.

The last day of January brought a blizzard, one of the biggest snowfalls in living memory. When the sky cleared the frost was severe. The sea was like a mirror and Robbie's neighbours suggested that they try some fishing. **When they got to the fishing-grounds the fish were plentiful and easy to catch,** in fact they took the hooks so keenly that they didn't even need to bait them. For several days Robbie and his neighbours got enough fish to keep them going for a while and even had enough to give to the old people in the parish.

One day Robbie declined to go fishing, as he had work on the farm that needed his attention. The men set off, but without Robbie they caught very few fish. Two days later Robbie went back with them and they had fish galore. This got Robbie thinking. He wondered if it had anything to do with the trows.

The thaw came with gales and rain. The men had to go to the hills and look for the sheep. Everyone had losses, except Robbie. All his sheep were alive and well. **Gales in September destroyed the crop, except for Robbie's corn, which stood tall and heavy with grain.**

On Owld Yul Een, Robbie took the same path as he had done the previous year. He met the same tiny red haired trow and was again invited to play at their foy. And so it went on, year after year. Through his good luck Robbie and his family were no longer poor.

One year the trow failed to appear, although Robbie walked the path several times. That evening Robbie took his fiddle and set out for the trow's home. The place was as silent as the grave, only a small fire was burning. **Beside it an old trow woman was sitting.** "Thank you for coming, Robbie, but you are not needed." "Where is everyone?" he asked.

"Everybody has left," she said. "There is a new minister living nearby. He hates us trows and preaches against us. My folk have gone to the Faroe Islands to be away from him, but I'm too old to move and I'm a bit deaf, so I can't hear him anyway."

Slowly, Robbie made his way home. His wife was surprised to see him, but they went to their neighbours' houses and he played for them, just like he had done in the past.

**He had no more trowie luck from that day forward,** he was an ordinary man again, like everyone else.







### **Travel information**

Some useful information to know about travelling on board MV Hamnavoe, MV Hjaltland, and MV Hrossey:

### **Supporting passengers with accessibility requirements**

Before travelling with NorthLink Ferries, make our staff aware of any specific accessibility requirements you may have by using the free WelcoMe App.

To find out more, please visit [www.wel-co.me](http://www.wel-co.me)

### **Fresh food and drink**

Our tasty and diverse menu boasts the best of locally sourced food and drink. Enjoy a delicious meal from our restaurant, The Feast. View our menu at [www.northlinkferries.co.uk/the-feast-menu](http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk/the-feast-menu)

### **Enjoy some holiday reading on us**

Download the free PressReader app at [www.pressreader.com](http://www.pressreader.com) before travelling. Then, when you open the app on NorthLink ships and ports, which are PressReader hotspots, you can download a range of complementary newspaper and magazines onto your mobile device!

### **Here for you!**

The NorthLink Ferries passenger service team want you to have a safe and comfortable time on board and are on hand for the duration of your voyage. If there is anything we can do for you, please contact one of our crew who will be more than happy to assist.



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